

PLEASE RESTORE FUNDING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

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Client and Member of the Board of the Disabilities Center of Eastern Connecticut

Madam Chairman and members of the Appropriations committee: I am Richard Suckau, from Norwich. I grew up expecting to work all my life, and did until I became disabled.

My disability is mostly invisible. You cannot tell by looking at me what kind of help I need. I live on the border of life, not disabled enough for sympathy—whatever that's worth-- and not "normal" enough to work. I think of myself as normal, though I'm not really sure what that is. People like me often fall into the cracks of the system. They don't know how to help themselves, so they eat at soup kitchens, drown their sorrows, and wallow in self-pity.

Independent Living Centers, like the Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC) "adopt" cases like mine. They start by offering a friendly and accepting ear, and move on to short term answers that eventually build into long term solutions. They work mostly by connecting people to resources that can meet their needs.

Independent Living Centers do not give out complicated forms that people need a law degree to read. They do not have complicated intake procedures designed to discourage people from coming back. They do not turn people away who have multiple disabilities or other complications. They accept people as they are. They provide hope and human kindness.

Independent Living Centers help people navigate the state system. They save *money* by saving *people* from being more disabled than they need to be. They know how complicated it is because all of the staff have disabilities too and all are paid from different grants. DSS uses that complicated funding structure to justify *eliminating* state funding for Independent Living Centers and admits that one or more may close. That cost is acceptable to DSS, but not to me. I can think of no better investment of—the state's money. Can you?

Thank you for your attention. Just having you listen gives me some confidence that you will do the right thing.